Communication Planning Guidelines

This Suite of Tools Includes:

Type	Name
Doc (MS Word)	Communication Planning Guidelines
Doc (MS Word)	Communication Goals Themes Set Template
Doc (MS Word)	Communication Planning Vehicles Analysis
XLS (MS Excel)	Communication Planning Example
XLS (MS Excel)	Communication Planning Template
Doc (MS Word)	Communication Leaders Guide Template

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Summary

The purpose of this tool set is to assist in developing a Change Communication Strategy and Communication Plan. It provides guidelines and templates to support the Communication planning process. This process starts with creating the Communication Strategy (goal and theme setting, continuing with vehicle analysis) and ends with creating a Communication Plan. The instructions and background that follow are intended for use in conjunction with the *Change Communication Templates* and communication-related parts of the Stakeholder Mapping tools.

Application Guide

Purpose:

The purpose of this tool is to develop a Change Communication Strategy and work plan to assist in the implementation of a major business transformation.

Value to the Business:

It accelerates understanding and increases acceptance of the transformation initiative on the part of various stakeholder groups. In so doing, it helps to accelerate implementation of the business transformation.

When to Use:

Use this tool set in the early phase of a transformation initiative and at the beginning of each major phase for multi-year transformations. A Communication Plan is a dynamic document that warrants regular revisiting.

Principal Outputs, Work Products, and Deliverables:

The principal outputs are a Communication Strategy and action plan with defined goals, detailing themes and messages, vehicles, responsibilities, and schedules for relevant stakeholder groups.

Introduction and Process Overview

Among the eight Change Factors for Success (CFS), Change-specific Communication is one of the most resource-intensive in the change implementation process. When done correctly, a substantial amount of time and thought goes into developing and disseminating the appropriate themes, messages, and materials to the organization's internal and external stakeholders.

Change-specific Communication is not a one-time activity, but a process that unfolds throughout a business transformation. For these reasons, it requires a team effort that involves thoughtful goal-setting and careful planning in order to communicate the *right things* at the *right time* in the *right way* through the *right means* to the *right people*.

The materials in the Communication Planning tool set are intended to facilitate the coordinated development of a Communication Strategy and a Communication Plan through a series of three steps. These materials also assist in the implementation, review, and modification of the plan as the project proceeds.

It is critical the Transformation Management Leadership Team completes a stakeholder analysis prior to developing a Change Communication Strategy. Materials for conducting a stakeholder analysis are found in the Stakeholder Involvement Planning tools, which are designed for use in conjunction with the Stakeholder Mapping tool. The stakeholder analysis allows for a better understanding of the audience to whom we communicate, and we can proceed with the development of the Communication Strategy and Plan.

When developing the Communication Plan, consider how it will help move stakeholders up the Commitment Curve. The Commitment Curve and related explanation appear below:

Adapted from ODR, Inc.
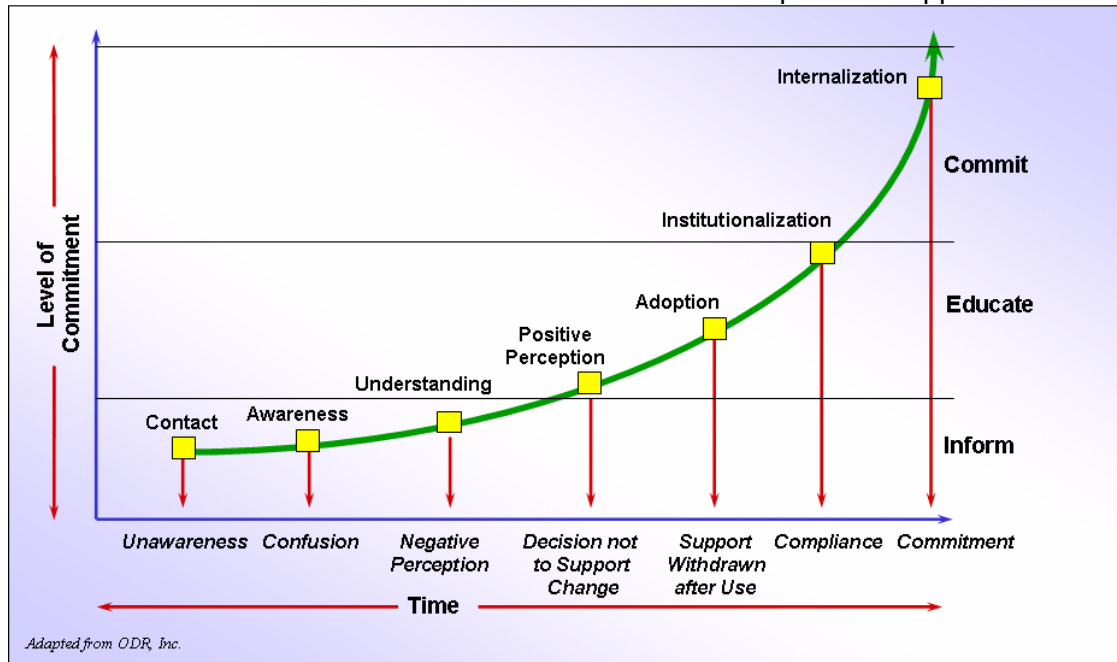
These eight stages of commitment build upon each other through the three broad phases of the Commitment Curve — Inform, Educate and Commit.

Contact:	The earliest encounter an individual or group has with the fact that change is taking place (for example, an announcement or memo).
Awareness:	The individual or group has a working knowledge of the change.
Understanding:	The individual or group demonstrates comprehension of the nature and intent of the change (that is, what are the expectations of them).
Positive Perception:	The individual or group develops a positive view and disposition toward the change.
Installation:	The change becomes operational.
Adoption:	The change has been used long enough to demonstrate its worth and affect the organization.
Institutionalization:	The change has durability and continuity, and the organization has formally incorporated it into its routine operating procedures.
Internalization:	Organization members are highly committed to the change because it is congruent with their personal interests, goals, or value system.

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[1] Adapted from ODR, Inc.

It is important to note that the eight stages are developmental and individuals must go through every phase in order to achieve the next phase. While communication is in fact a major way to help move people from one stage to another, it is most effective in the initial stages in helping progress people from "Contact" to "Awareness". Other means, such as demos of a new system or hands-on experiences might be effective in raising people to the "Understanding" stage. Therefore, different types of activities should be included as part of the Communication Strategy to address the needs of each stakeholder/ stakeholder group and the commitment level to which they need to achieve.

The following notes expand upon the use of the Commitment Curve:

- It may not be necessary for any or all stakeholders to have achieved "Internalization" by the end of the project or completion of this phase of the project. For example, it is difficult and unlikely to expect that employees move to internalization during the early months or even first few years of a five-year-plus transformation effort.

- In most cases, it will be necessary for Change Leaders, typically members of a senior executive group, to move to institutionalization or internalization as early in the project as possible.

- Stakeholder groups can include many individuals. While the goal is to move a stakeholder group to a specific point on the map, not all individuals within the group will be at the same point, or remain in forward progress consistently.

- Stakeholders who are trying to influence the behavior of others MUST be farther along the curve than the individuals or groups whom they are trying to influence. For example, managers who are attempting to move employees to "Understanding" must themselves at least be to "Positive Perception".

Creating a Communication Plan requires three fundamental steps— *Goals and Themes Setting, Vehicles Analysis, and Developing the Communication Plan.* These three fundamental steps are sequential and built upon each other.

Templates, database forms, and reports related to communication planning are accessible from the Change Communications Planning main menu. The intent of these templates is for preliminary or one-time data collection and analysis. The following explains the communication planning process in detail and indicates how to efficiently and effectively apply the accompanying templates and database for each of the three fundamental steps.

Process Options

The person who leads the change or develops the Communication Strategy and Communication Plan can complete this process. It is often quicker and more effective, however, to use a collaborative approach to complete these activities, especially when it is a large scale or global change effort.

It is most effective to work through the three-step process in one or more working sessions that involve the transformation team and other managers or specialists who are familiar with the relevant details and issues. Often, the process takes a series of discussions to agree on the goals, themes, messages, and final plan. These discussions help participants get a better understanding of the essence of the change and the best ways to communicate it. Collaboration is also a good way to ensure thorough identification and thinking through of all the elements in the plan early on in the effort.

Timing

Creating the goals, themes, and vehicles should take place as early as possible, since these are necessary to introduce and position the change effort. However, as major phases end or as the project's business case goes through revisions, the plan requires reviewing to ensure its continued consistency with the business case and project goals.

Goals and Themes Setting

The Goal and Themes Setting phase assists in determining a series of communication goals achieved through the implementation of the Communication Strategy, as well as the key themes communicated through the process. The ***Communication Goals and Themes Setting Template*** is useful in this effort.

The overall goals for the communication effort require definition early in the project. They help provide the scope of the communication effort and they should tie very closely to the scope of the overall project.

Consider the following when determining the Communication Plan goals:

- Ensure that all goals are both measurable and achievable.

- Recognize that in many transformation initiatives, the establishment of goals is an iterative process with the specificity of goals increasing as the direct impact of the change is better understood on both the organization and key stakeholders.

- Refer to the project's business case and value proposition, both in initial form and as they are revised, to help determine goals.

- Solicit input from the Executive Sponsor, transformation team, and other managers or specialists who are familiar with the change process in providing the content useful in establishing goals.

Examples of Goals:

The following are examples of communication goals from several actual transformation efforts. These appear as models only:
- Help create in the target audience a clear understanding and buy-in of the goals and benefits of Program X.
- Create a sense of excitement among end-users, sponsors, project team, etc. concerning the project.
- Provide for honest communication from end-users regarding Program X.
- Ensure appropriate audiences are aware of project status through clear and concise updates on progress of project.

Themes

Themes are the "sound bites" of a change effort, similar in tone and construct to sound bites created to support marketing or political campaigns. Short, pithy, and memorable, they are easily repeatable and reinforced throughout the communication process. Themes are generally:

- Enterprise-wide in nature.

- Applicable to most, if not all, stakeholders.

- Long term in their scope, often for the duration of the project.

In addition, themes reflect the organization's desired future behaviors, needs, and values, as well as the long-term implications of the initiative. They are strategic (rather than tactical) in nature, and establish the baseline and context for messages and information. The goal of the Themes Setting process is to identify the recurring threads that need reinforcement throughout the implementation of the Communication Strategy and Plan. These threads will form the core of all communications to stakeholders as the Transformation Management Leadership Team announces, positions, designs, and implements the change process. Every message communicated through every vehicle to every audience should be able to tie back to at least one strategic level theme. These themes will ultimately need to be personalized to each audience with specific information relative to the audience (i.e., what is in it for me?).

Example of Themes:

The following are examples of themes from several actual enterprise-wide reengineering and transformation efforts. These appear as models only.

- Think globally, act locally

- Enhanced ability to address industry issues on a global basis

- Better process integration

- Deliver dynamic and flexible business solutions

- Enabling the re-evaluation, enhancement, and evolution of business solutions

- Creating sustainable competitive advantage

- Maximizing economic profit

- Making what we imagine today, a reality tomorrow

- Improve our ability to make fact-based, value-added decisions

- Radically improving the way we collect, manage, use, and share information

- Creating tools to achieve the goals of value-based management

The Change-Specific Vision as a Source for Theme Creation

While there are several sources for analyzing and determining themes, the vision statement can often provide the cornerstone. The vision statement is specific to the change program. It ties the change program and its future state into the overall enterprise-wide vision (or strategy); and it details both what is going to change and why the change is being made.

The vision itself must be effectively communicated on an enterprise-level to all stakeholders and should make clear why the change is necessary for the organization as well, as what affects the change will have on the organization. The vision, together with the themes emerging from it, must provide a focus or context for stakeholders to understand the reasons for decisions and actions.

The *Communication Goals and Themes Setting Template* provides a list of questions to help analyze the change vision and come up with key themes to communicate through the change initiative. It is also important to base the themes setting on other sources of knowledge such as the project charter, the improvement portfolio, and the business case.

Now, complete the *Communication Goals and Themes Setting Template* included in this suit of tools.

Hint:

When creating goals and themes, put yourself in the place of the stakeholders who are being impacted by the change. Call to mind your own experiences as a stakeholder in a significant change effort. Answer this question:

If I were a stakeholder in this operational unit, what would I want and need to know in order to effectively be positioned to comply with or commit to the change?

Next Steps

Following your completion of the Goals and Themes Setting Phase, proceed to step two and complete the Vehicle Analysis template, as instructed below. This will allow you to determine which communication vehicles are most effective in achieving the communication goals outlined in this Phase.

Vehicles Analysis

Introduction

Vehicles comprise a number of delivery and receipt methods. Vehicles deliver messages to stakeholders; vehicles are the receipt of feedback, input, and other forms of upward communication from stakeholders. Vehicles commonly represent types of media, but in fact, serve a much broader purpose and have a wider scope than conventional media. They are generally the people or media through which themes, messages, and information travel to stakeholders (e.g., in one-on-one discussions, small group meetings, large group presentations, print, e-mail, etc.)

Please note:

In many cases, pressure will be applied to identify vehicles as an early step in the communication process. In reality, however, analyzing and identifying vehicles is the final step in developing the core elements of a Communication Strategy. It is only after the identification of stakeholders, goals, and themes that you should focus on vehicles. For stakeholders, refer to your results from the *Stakeholder Involvement Planning Template* performed as part of the Stakeholder Involvement Planning Toolset. The key stakeholders will form your communication audience.

Purpose

The purpose of the vehicle analysis in developing a Communication Strategy is to assess the methods for communications that are currently used, determine how effective they are, and identify other methods that might be created to support the achievement of goals established for the Communication Strategy. This process is in fact a current state assessment of the organizational methods used for communication, and it assists in deciding on future methods that would be most effective through the Communication Strategy. In addition, the analysis helps participants understand the process for using the current methods, which is a crucial factor in determining the effectiveness of a vehicle. For example, a newsletter is published every month on the 15th, but articles are due to the owner on the first, and therefore this vehicle might not be effective for quick updates.

Considerations

When planning for the use of communication vehicles, consider the following points:

- In an environment where the program represents a significant change, the use of new types of vehicles to communicate with stakeholders sends a visible signal that, in fact, the organization IS changing.

- The use of an organization's existing communication vehicles is an expedient way of implementing a Communication Strategy. It is critical, however, that the existing vehicles have established credibility. In most cases, the perceptions that stakeholders have of an existing vehicle will transfer onto the themes, messages, and information conveyed through it.

- To ensure that themes and messages effectively reach targeted stakeholders, it is important to convey them through a variety of vehicles.

- In most cases, the "preferred" method of receiving communication is through face-to-face meetings with the stakeholder's immediate supervisor or manager.

- Videotape is most effective for creating a perception or positive reaction and least effective for communicating facts and details.

Now, complete steps one (current vehicle analysis) and two (creating additional future vehicles), in the ***Communication Planning Vehicle Analysis*** that is included in this suit of tools.

Next Steps

Following your completion of the Goals and Themes Setting and the Vehicle Analysis, proceed to the final step and complete the Communication Plan.

Developing the Communication Plan

After completing the Communication Strategy (***Communication Goals and Themes Setting Template*** and ***Communication Planning Vehicle Analysis***), the Communication Team is ready to develop the more detailed Communication Plan. The Communication Plan outlines the communications needs of each stakeholder group and the specific activities, goals, vehicles, and responsibilities for dissemination of information related to the project. This plan is a dynamic document updated regularly to meet the needs of the transformation initiative.

When articulating the Communication Plan, consider how effective each message and vehicle combination will be. Apply the following criteria to help determine effectiveness:

- **Reach –** is the right message going to the correct audience for that message?

- **Understanding –** is the message contained in the communication products or activities easy to understand and is it concise, clear, and relevant?

- **Timing –** is the timing of product or activity correct?

- **Media –** does the medium for the communications product effectively reflect the audience and the message?

A template of a Communication plan appears in the *Communication Planning Template* included in this suite of tools. Below is a list of definitions describing the content for future completion in each column of the template matrix, as well as the sources for gathering the needed information. Usually, the completed templates from the previous steps are the sources for getting information for the Communication Plan.

Definitions

Themes – The key themes communicated through the communication process. Use themes from the *Communication Goals and Themes Setting Template*.

Description – The description includes both a high-level title of the communication phase to be listed in the blue rows (e.g. Program Introduction, Status Updates) as well as objectives and descriptions of the content delivered in each communication activity (listed in each row).

Message – Messages are necessary for stakeholders at the operational level to reach a certain level of behavioral change. Base messages on the themes and the goals already established. Messages should contain specific impact on the operation and on stakeholders.

Audience/Stakeholders – These stakeholder(s) are the recipients of communication around key themes and messages. The stakeholders should be those identified during Stakeholder Mapping. All key stakeholder groups should be included in the Communication plan.

Purpose/Goal – Describe the goals for the communication event. The purpose can originate from the Goals and Theme Setting template. Usually, the purpose is to achieve a certain level of behavioral change.

Vehicle – The person or media through which to share the communication event. Use the current/ future state vehicle analysis to decide on the most effective methods for each communication event.

Developer – The main person who is responsible for creating the communication.

Approver – The person/ people responsible for approving the communication prior to its distribution/ delivery. This should include all required project, department, legal, etc. approvals.

Deliverer – In case the communication message is delivered by people (meetings, presentations), formally identify these people.

Timing: Development – Complete writing of the communication by this date. It must be ready to begin the approval process.

Timing: Approval – Complete the approval process of the written communication by this date. It must be ready to move to the communication vehicle's owner.

Timing: Delivery – The scheduled delivery date of the communication event. Communication events can be on-going or one-time events.

Status – Whether the event is completed/ in progress/ not executed.

Feedback Method – The methods used to gather feedback about how effective the communication event is in achieving its goals. Common feedback methods include surveys and informal feedback.

Accountability – The person who is ultimately accountable for making sure the communication event is completed.

Action Plan – A list of actions need to assure the communication event is completed.

A partially completed *Communication Planning Example* for reference appears in this suite of tools.